England, Afghanistan register solid wins in U-19 World Cup

HARARE: England and Afghanistan produced solid all-round displays as they bagged big wins against Zimbabwe and West Indies respectively in the U-19 World Cup on Sunday.

Rain forced a share of the spoils between New Zealand and USA but not before Nitesh Sudini lit up the stage with a terrific hundred for USA.

Zimbabwe struggled to get going after being put in to bat by England as both the openers, Nathaniel Hlabangana and Kupakwashe Muradzi, departed just eight runs between them.

Kian Blignaut and Dhruv Patel steadied the ship for Zimbabwe with a 45-run stand. The partnership was followed by Tatenda Chimugoro combining alongside Patel for another 32 runs before the latter was dismissed.

Captain Simbarashe Mudzengerere then took the charge and carried his bat through but kept on running out of partners as Zimbabwe just about managed to cross the 200-run mark in their 50 overs, finishing with a score of 208.

Zimbabwe managed to dismiss the English openers, Ben Dawkins and Joseph Moores cheaply but Ben Mayes and captain Thomas Rew took the attack to the Zimbabwe bowlers.

Rew (86) and Mayes (77) both remained unbeaten as England won the game comfortably by eight wickets, chasing down the target in just 28 overs, putting them on the cusp of qualification for the Super Six stage.

England's final group game is against Scotland on Wednesday while Zimbabwe face Pakistan on Thursday.

Afghanistan opted to bat first after winning the toss and the opening batters, Khalid Ahmadzai and Osman Sadat, justified that decision with a solid 86-run stand. Vitel Lawes broke the partnership, making way for a Windies comeback with two more wickets.

Captain Mehboob Taskin then came out to bat, joining Sadat at the crease as the duo revived the Afghanistan innings. While Sadat scored 88, he added 77 runs in his partnership with Taskin. Led by the skipper, Afghanistan managed to post a score of 262/6 in their 50 overs.

Jakeem Pollard and Lawes grabbed three wickets each for West Indies.

Afghanistan were on the mark with the ball from the get-go, picking up three wickets in the first five overs.

For West Indies, Jewel Andrew was the lone warrior as he bagged a half-century against a persistent Afghan bowling attack, who managed to wrap up the Windies innings for 124.

Wahidullah Zadran and Khatir Stanikzai grabbed three wickets each with Nooristani Omarzai being the pick of the bowlers with four wickets in a 138-run win.

Afghanistan, now into the Super Six, face Tanzania in their next match on Wednesday with West Indies taking on South Africa on Thursday.

New Zealand won the toss and opted to bowl first and came out all guns blazing, blowing the USA top order away to leave them reeling at 40/5 inside ten overs.

Shiv Shani offered the first bit of resistance as his knock of 33 slowed down the New Zealand charge, allowing USA a chance to rebuild.

Nitish Sudini who came in to bat at number seven for USA grabbed that chance with both hands, leading the counter-attack. Stitching a 103-run partnership for the seventh wicket with Adit Kappa, he led USA across the 200-run mark.

Even after Kappa was dismissed, Sudini continued his endeavour to take USA to 253 in their 50 overs, remaining unbeaten on 117.

His knock blew new life into the USA who seemed on their knees in the first part of their innings.

While New Zealand started their innings with a bang, smashing 12 runs in the very first over, the heavens opened. There was no further action as the game was washed out with the points being split.

New Zealand will face India next on Saturday while USA take on Bangladesh on Friday. —Agencies

WINDHOEK: Afghanistan batter Mahboob Khan plays a shot during the U-19 World Cup match against the West Indies at the High Performance Oval on Sunday.—Courtesy ICC

INDORE: New Zealand players celebrate with the series trophy after beating India in the third One-day International at the Holkar Cricket Stadium on Sunday.—AFP

Mitchell, Phillips hammer tons as NZ beat India to clinch ODI series

INDORE: New Zealand batters Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips scored centuries in a superb partnership to lay the platform for a 41-run win over India in the third one-day international (ODI) in Indore on Sunday, which sealed a comeback 2-1 series victory for the touring side.

A target of 337 left the hosts facing a daunting task and they ran out of steam despite veteran Virat Kohli's battling knock of 124.

India started shakily and lost wickets at frequent intervals before Kohli gave home fans hope as he combined with Nitish Kumar Reddy (53) in an 88-run partnership.

Kristian Clarke removed Reddy to stymie India's momentum and the required run rate quickly climbed, but Kohli found another able partner in Harshit Rana as the pair stepped on the gas.

Kohli reached a record-extending 54th ODI century and Rana hit a whirlwind 52 off 43 balls, before a decisive over from Zak Foulkes broke India's resistance.

Scoreboard

NEW ZEALAND:
D. Conway c Sharma b Rana 5
H. Nicholls b Singh 0
W. Young c Jadeja b Rana 30
D. Mitchell c Yadav b Siraj 137
G. Phillips c Rahul b Singh 106
M. Bracewell not out 28
M. Hay lbw b Yadav 2
Z. Foulkes c Yadav b Singh 10
K. Clarke b Rana 11
EXTRAS (B-, NB-2, W-1) 8
TOTAL (for eight wickets, 50 overs) 337
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-5 (Nicholls), 2-5 (Conway), 3-58 (Young), 4-277 (Phillips), 5-283 (Mitchell), 6-286 (Hay), 7-304 (Foulkes), 8-327 (Clarke)
DID NOT BAT: K. Jamieson, J. Lennox
BOWLING: Singh 10-1-63-3, Rana 10-0-84-3 (1w), Siraj 10-0-43-1, Reddy 8-0-53-0, Yadav 6-0-48-1 (1nb), Jadeja 6-0-41-0 (1nb)

INDIA:
R. Sharma c Clarke b Foulkes 11
S. Gill b Jamieson 23
V. Kohli c Mitchell b Clarke 124
S. Iyer c Foulkes b Clarke 3
K.L. Rahul c Phillips b Lennox 1
N. K. Reddy c Young b Clarke 53
R. Jadeja c Young b Lennox 12
H. Rana c Nicholls b Foulkes 52
M. Siraj c Hay b Foulkes 0
K. Yadav run out (Phillips) 5
A. Singh not out 4
EXTRAS (LB-1, NB-1 W-6) 8
TOTAL (all out, 46 overs) 296
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-28 (Sharma), 2-45 (Gill), 3-68 (Iyer), 4-71 (Rahul), 5-159 (Reddy), 6-178 (Jadeja), 7-277 (Rana), 8-277 (Siraj), 9-292 (Kohli)
BOWLING: Jamieson 9-0-58-1 (1w), Foulkes 9-0-77-3 (2w, 1nb), Clarke 9-0-54-3 (2w), Lennox 10-0-42-2, Mitchell 1-0-10-0 (1w), Phillips 8-0-54-0
RESULT: New Zealand won by 41 runs.

Foulkes tempted Rana with a full toss which was caught by Henry Nicholls at long-on, before an edge from Mohammed Siraj carried through to wicketkeeper Mitchell Hay on the next delivery.

The final blow was dealt two overs later, when Kohli miscued a shot and sent the ball sailing into the hands of Mitchell at long-off.

"After the first game, coming here 1-1, the way we played was disappointing. Lot of areas need improving. Virat's batting and Harshit's batting have been positives," India captain Shubman Gill said.

New Zealand were struggling at 58-3 after being put into bat on a Holkar Stadium wicket known for producing high-scoring games.

However, Mitchell took the attack to the hosts' bowlers and was well supported by Phillips as they added 219 off 188 balls.

Mitchell, who made 84 in the first ODI and 131 in the second, hit 15 fours and three sixes to post a career-high ODI score of 137 and record his fourth century in India.

"It's really nice to contribute and to win over here. The way we built partnerships, with (Will) Young and GP (Phillips)," said Mitchell, who was named Player of the Series.

"Always nice to get stuck into moments with your mates. I'm just trying to concentrate on being present, watch the ball and repeat, and make some good decisions. GP is a mate, awesome to see him get a 100."

The teams next meet in a five-match Twenty20 International series from January 21-31, a key part of their preparations for the T20 World Cup which begins on February 7 and will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.—Reuters

Australia great Martyn says he was given '50-50 chance' of survival

MELBOURNE: Australian Test cricket great Damien Martyn has revealed he was only given a 50 per cent chance of surviving after being put in an induced coma with meningitis last month.

The 54-year-old former batsman, who played 67 Tests between 1992 and 2006 and 208 One-day Internationals, was rushed to hospital on December 27 with the disease that causes swelling of membranes around the brain.

He was in a coma for eight days, but miraculously pulled through and is now back home.

In a heartfelt social media post late Saturday, Martyn said it was touch and go whether he would live and the experience was a reminder of "how fragile life is".

"After being given a 50-50 chance of surviving, I came out of the induced coma eight days later not able to walk or talk," he said. "And yet four days after that, with the doctors in disbelief, I walked, I talked and proved to them all why I should be released from hospital to start my recovery.

"So happy to be home, to be able to put my feet in the sand on the beach and to start thanking all those people that reached out to me and my family in their unwavering support," he added. "Bring on 2026 ... I'm back."

Known as one of the game's great strokemakers, Martyn became a key figure in Steve Waugh's all-powerful Australia side, hitting 13 centuries and averaging 46.37. He was also part of the Australia team that won the 2003 ODI World Cup, cracking 88 not out in the final against India in a match-winning partnership with Ricky Ponting.—AFP

No Venus fairytale as Alcaraz, Sabalenka win Melbourne openers

MELBOURNE: Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka launched their Australian Open title bids with straight-sets wins but there was no fairytale for 45-year-old Venus Williams on Sunday.

On a hot Melbourne day in which a ball girl fainted, last year's men's beaten finalist Alexander Zverev dropped a set before easing into the second round.

World number one Alcaraz joined him, the Spaniard beating 81st-ranked home player Adam Walton 6-3, 7-6(7/2), 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena.

Alcaraz, who is desperate to win the Australian Open to complete the career Grand Slam of all four majors, plays Germany's Yannick Hanfmann next.

"I think this kind of level and the difficulties in the first round is pretty good for me," said Alcaraz, who was pushed all the way in the second set.

"But overall just happy. I'm pleased about the level that I played today," added Alcaraz, who was playing his first competitive match for nine weeks.

"I just stayed at home," the 22-year-old said of his long break.

"I used to practise the whole morning [and] I took almost every afternoon off to do whatever I wanted - stay with family or friends, play board games and chilling at home. It's a better way to recharge the batteries, staying at home with the people you love."

Alcaraz has won the US Open, Wimbledon and French Open, but Melbourne is the one Grand Slam missing from his impressive resume.

The furthest he has gone at the opening major of the year is the quarter-finals and he has made it clear that dethroning rival Jannik Sinner as champion is his main aim for 2026.

If he does so, the 22-year-old would surpass compatriot Rafael Nadal to become the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam.

Earlier, in steamy conditions approaching highs of 30 degrees centigrade, Zverev threatened to implode in losing the first set to Canada's Gabriel Diallo.

But the 28-year-old German recovered to win 6-7(1/7), 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 and next meets Australian Alexei Popyrin or Alexandre Muller of France.

Asked how he reset from his first-set wobble, the third seed said: "I was thinking it can't get worse than that."

British qualifier Arthur Fery scored the first big upset by taking down 20th seed Flavio Cobolli of Italy, 7-6(7/1), 6-4, 6-1.

Novak Djokovic, who is chasing a record 25th major title, begins his title assault on Monday, as does three-time runner-up Daniil Medvedev.

Organisers said that a record 100,000 people came through the gates, although there were complaints about long queues in the heat.

Underlining how fierce it was on court, a ball girl collapsed during the match between Zeynep Sonmez and Ekaterina Alexandrova, with both players rushing to help her.

But the heat didn't bothered the world no 1 as Sabalenka began her bid for a third Australian Open title in four years.

The Belarusian had a patchy start before coming good in the second set.

Sabalenka, stunned by Madison Keys in the 2025 final, ultimately had too much power, guile and quality for French wildcard Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajaonah.

But the top seed took time to find her touch, making a series of unforced errors before taming the spirited 20-year-old 6-4, 6-1 on Rod Laver Arena.

"It's the first match, right? You're always kind of trying to figure out where you are," said the women's top seed. "I didn't really know much about her. I was just struggling to find the rhythm of her shots. I'm happy that I could manage and I could get this win in straight sets."

Sabalenka said she had felt added pressure with tennis legends Roger Federer and Rod Laver court-side.

"I hope you guys enjoyed watching me play, I hope you enjoyed it even a little bit," she said in her on-court interview, addressing the duo.

Sabalenka faces Chinese qualifier Bai Zhuoxuan next.

Title rivals Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff play on Monday.

Also safely through was seventh-seeded Italian Jasmine Paolini as she outclassed Belarusian qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich 6-1, 6-2.

UKRAINE'S Marta Kostyuk hits a return against Elsa Jacquemot of France during their Australian Open match on Sunday.—AFP

Elina Svitolina, the Ukrainian 12th seed, eased past Cristina Bucsa of Spain 6-4, 6-1.

But seeded fellow Ukrainians Dayana Yastremska and Marta Kostyuk were dumped out early, as was the American great Williams.

The seven-time major champion was the oldest woman to play in the history of the Australian Open.

She showed glimpses of what once made her world number one, but ultimately fell after an epic battle with an opponent more than 20 years her junior.

Olga Danilovic of Serbia outlasted the veteran 6-7(5/7), 6-3, 6-4 over a gruelling 2hrs 17mins.

"It was such a great game, such a great moment. The energy from the crowd was amazing. That lifted me up so much," Williams said.

Meanwhile, with extra security deployed at the tournament following the mass shooting at Sydney's Bondi Beach last month, the patience of fans was earlier tested as they lined up in long, snaking queues to the Melbourne Park gates under a hot sun.

Organisers delivered an unwelcome surprise by halting sales of the popular "ground pass" tickets within an hour of the first shot being hit, citing intense demand.

The move disappointed hundreds of fans who had queued for long periods expecting to buy the cheaper walk-up tickets which allow access to the minor courts.

"We tried to buy a ground pass and they just told us it was only tickets that were A$229 ($153) per person," Melbourne resident Susan Walsh told Reuters. "Didn't want to spend that much money... so, a bit disappointed."—Agencies

Wasteful Newcastle held by lowly Wolves

LONDON: Newcastle United's push towards the Premier League's top four was derailed by a damaging 0-0 draw against bottom of the table Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday.

Eddie Howe's side were unable to prise open the Wolves defence as two points slipped away at rain-lashed Molineux.

Wins over Burnley, Crystal Palace and Leeds had bolstered their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League.

But the Magpies are stuck in eighth place after failing to beat Wolves.

Following their disappointing 2-0 defeat against Manchester City in the League Cup semi-final first leg on Tuesday, it was another frustrating result for Newcastle.

With crucial matches against top four rivals Aston Villa and Liverpool looming before the end of the month, Howe's men must get back on track quicky.

Wolves are now unbeaten in four league games but still sit 14 points from safety.

Nick Woltemade had gone six games without a goal and the Newcastle striker wasted a chance to end that drought when he headed wide from a good position.

Woltemade, who had scored only twice in his previous 12 appearances, was guilty of another wasteful miss moments later, heading over from Kieran Trippier's cross.

Mateus Mane has emerged as bright spot for Wolves in their gloomy campaign and the teenage forward tested Newcastle goalkeeper Nick Pope with a hooked effort from Hwang Hee-chan's flick.

Newcastle were well below their best but Malick Thiaw almost put them ahead just before half-time with a header that hit the post before Wolves scrambled it off the line.

Having failed to muster a shot on target in the first half, Newcastle needed a fast start after the interval.

But there was no improvement in their sluggish performance and after Joelinton scuffed wide, the frustrated Howe made a triple substitution.

He sent on Yoane Wissa, Anthony Elanga and Lewis Miley for Woltemade, Anthony Gordon and Sandro Tonali.

Newcastle finally showed signs of life after that and Trippier curled a free-kick into the side-netting from 25 yards.

Trippier threatened again with a shot on the turn that Jose Sa repelled before the Wolves keeper clutched Joelinton's effort from the rebound.

ARSENAL FRUSTRATED

On Saturday, Arsenal missed a slew of chances in a 0-0 draw at Nottingham Forest but went seven points clear at the top of the Premier League table after City's 2-0 loss to Manchester United.

Mikel Arteta's side had a golden opportunity to increase their advantage at the summit, but a dogged defensive performance from Forest and wasteful finishing from the Arsenal forwards meant they took only a point from a game they dominated for long spells.

"We tried to at the end find a goal. I don't think we conceded a single shot, again. But that's the margins and we didn't find a way to win it," Arteta said.

WOLVERHAMPTON: Wolverhampton Wanderers' Santiago Bueno (L) blocks a shot by Newcastle United's Harvey Barnes during their Premier League match at the Molineux Stadium on Sunday.—Reuters

Nicolas Dominguez brought the home crowd to their feet in the 12th minute, sending a deflected shot wide of the goal for a corner after a promising move by Forest, and Arsenal turned the screw.

Ben White whipped in a promising cross and from the resulting corner a shot by Noni Madueke made its way to Gabriel Martinelli who steered his close-range effort narrowly wide.

Brazilian defender Murillo recovered well from a mistake on the halfway line to deny Arsenal striker Viktor Gyokeres.

The best chance of the game fell to Arsenal substitute Bukayo Saka, who headed a Declan Rice cross back towards the far post, but Forest keeper Matz Sels pulled off a superb fingertip save to deny him.

Moments later Rice lofted a free kick into the box and although substitute Mikel Merino got his head to it, he flashed his effort wide as the Forest rearguard held firm.—Agencies